

Cherry Point State Aquatic Reserve



Site History

The site extends from the boundary of Birch Bay State Park to the border of the Lummi Nation reservation, and excludes three existing and one pending leasehold. Cherry Point itself is a small bulge of land just south of the northernmost pier. The reach is distinctive for its bathymetry with water depths reaching more than 70 feet just offshore making it an appealing area for shipping interests. A spawning stock of herring and abundant offshore aquatic vegetation attract a wide variety of wildlife.

This site was among the first sites formally withdrawn from leasing by Commissioner of Public Lands Jennifer Belcher in May 2000.

Reserve Program

The Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) manages about 2.4 million acres of aquatic lands on behalf of the public. DNR established three types of reserves (WAC 332-30-151) to help ensure environmental protection for public aquatic lands — Education, Environmental and Scientific Reserves. Using this authority the Commissioner of Public Lands withdrew six sites from leasing to be considered for Aquatic Reserve status during 2000.

During 2002, DNR developed an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Aquatic Reserves Program. The final EIS was adopted in September 2002.

Site Evaluation

All six sites withdrawn from leasing in 2000 will be evaluated for Aquatic Reserve status during 2003. Sites will be evaluated using designation criteria identified in the programmatic EIS. Guidance for the use of these designation criteria is currently being developed by DNR with the assistance of an external peer review committee.

Evaluation of the sites will be completed by a Technical Advisory Committee. DNR is currently collecting all available information regarding each of the six reserve sites through research and public meetings. The committee will evaluate this information and visit each site before making their recommendation to the Commissioner of Public Lands.

Natural Resources

Spawning later than other regional stocks, the Cherry Point stock of Pacific herring has long been considered unique. Once the largest stock in Washington, monitoring efforts have documented a steep decline in the health of this stock - Biomass has declined from more than 11,000 tons in the 1970's to just more than 1,000 tons recently.

Kelp beds are found just offshore throughout this reach while other aquatic vegetation including eelgrass is locally abundant. The location of Cherry Point between Lummi and Birch Bays make this area an important area for many marine birds as well as an important corridor used by salmon.

Site Management

Following the determination by the Commissioner of Public Lands regarding Aquatic Reserve status, DNR will begin a State Environmental Protection Act (SEPA) public process to develop management plans for each site. This process will occur for sites designated as Aquatic Reserves as well as those that will no longer be part of the Aquatic Reserve Program.

DNR expects to work with many partners, including other agencies, tribes, local governments and organizations to develop and implement management plans for Aquatic Reserves.

Aquatic Reserve Timeline

• Reserve withdrawn from leasing by Commissioner of Public Lands Jennifer Belcher

2000

• DNR adopts interim management guidance for leasing activities within reserves
• Programmatic EIS process initiated under SEPA
• Public meetings held to scope program, November 27-December 13

2001

Draft EIS published, May 31, 2002
Public meetings for Draft EIS, June 18-27
Aquatic Reserves Program Guidance Final EIS published, September 6, 2002

2002

• Site evaluation criteria developed, includes external peer review
• Information gathering Public meetings (May-June)
• Technical Advisory Committee site visit, Final Recommendation (Summer)
• Reserve Status Decision (Fall)
• Site management plan development (SEPA process) - Opportunities for Public Input

2003